

Environment Committee Public Hearing

Monday, February 2, 2009

Testimony by

Kim O'Rourke, Middletown Recycling Coordinator

Dear Representative Roy, Senator Meyer and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss these bills. Below are my comments.

**Support: SB. No. 661** AA Expanding the Beverage Container Redemption Provisions to Include Non Carbonated Beverages

**Support: SB No. 662** AA Expanding the Beverage Container Redemption Provisions to Include Water Bottles

Both these bills will help alleviate municipal burdens and increase recycling. Studies show that with a financial incentive people recycle more. The bottle bill is extremely effective. I also encourage using a portion of the escheat money from the expansion to fund statewide recycling programs. Recycling has been running on empty for over a decade. We can't possibly get to the 58% recycling goal without support and resources. Without meeting that goal, the State will be in need of additional disposal capacity for municipal solid waste. Expanding the bottle bill is a key component of the State's Solid Waste Management Plan.

**Support: HB 5215** AA Imposing a Five Cent Fee on Plastic Shopping bags provided by retail stores

This bill encourages source reduction, a key but often overlooked, solid waste strategy in this State. Putting a fee on bags will encourage people to bring their own. After working in this field for over fifteen years, it is clear that the BEST way to encourage recycling is to include a financial incentive. An educational campaign alone, will get some to recycle and some to bring their own bags, but it will not get the compliance that a financial incentive will. Studies have shown this to be true over and over again with solid waste programs. I also would like to take this opportunity to suggest that some of the revenue from this fee be dedicated to recycling and waste diversion programs. As mentioned above, recycling has suffered from lack of funding for over ten years.

**Support with changes: HB 5474:** AAC Private, municipal and state recycling.

I support this bill, but have some concerns.

Areas of concern:

1. Regarding the section encouraging biodegradable products: most of CT's waste is incinerated, not landfilled. I'm not sure what the environmental advantages are of requiring biodegradable products. Are you considering compostability or biodegradability? Currently there are no labeling standards and biodegradable could just mean that it breaks down into smaller pieces of plastic. If compostable, there are currently no composting facilities in the state that could even accept this material.

Biodegradable products also have the potential to wreak havoc with existing plastic recycling programs. Biodegradable plastics are made differently than regular plastics and can contaminate recycling programs.

I think this requirement needs to be thought out more. I'm not sure a requirement for biodegradability will help us in CT until the items can be composted. It's a complicated issue – perhaps a study on the topic would help, although, not sure how that would be funded.

2. Requiring all plastics to be recycled: YIKES! Please don't mandate this! And I love recycling! First, in CT most towns are only recycling #1 and #2 plastic CONTAINERS. Markets for other plastic containers are very hard to find. The expense of just adding other plastic CONTAINERS will be an expensive burden, not to mention, it may be impossible to find adequate stable markets, especially considering the current market conditions. The concept of requiring ALL plastics is not sustainable. Markets would not support a program to recycle all plastics.
3. Curbside Recycling – In Middletown, private haulers collect most residential customers curbside. City government collects only a small portion of the City. I am hoping this section will not require the City to implement curbside collection, but allow private haulers to continue what they currently do.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these proposals. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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